

**STATE BOARD MEETING DATE**

October 27, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Consideration of Review Case No. C-2008-042-R, McDonald, Bria A.

**SUBMITTED BY:** Charles Easaw, Chief Investigator, Investigative Unit, State Board of Education

**MANAGEMENT TEAM REVIEW:** October 09, 2008

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Bria McDonald (a.k.a. Lawndia Venerable) applied for a Substitute certificate on April 06, 2008.

On her statement, Ms. McDonald wrote that in January, 1997, she was charged with theft of public school funds. In August, 1995, Ms. McDonald established a charter school, "Citizen 2000," and was its sole proprietor. After an investigative audit by the Arizona Auditor General's Office in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, it was revealed that Ms. McDonald used school accounts for the payment of personal debts, and that payments for these personal debts were accounted for as if they were school debts.

The circumstances surrounding the case are as follows:

In August, 1995, Ms. McDonald was awarded one of Arizona's first approved Charter Schools. A complaint was filed in 1997, charging inaccurate school counts in 1995. The audit revealed that Ms. McDonald controlled virtually all of Citizen 2000's assets which had little or no internal accounting controls, and no accountability to anyone, either outside or inside the organization. The audit further revealed that Citizen 2000 received \$250,439.00 in overpaid tuition based on inaccurate enrollment figures provided to the Arizona Department of Education. On November 18, 1996, Ms. McDonald filed a voluntary petition for individual Chapter 7 bankruptcy, and closed Citizen 2000. On November 19, 1996, she filed a voluntary petition for Corporate Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Citizen 2000 students enrolled in other schools at midterm and the cost of their education was absorbed by those schools and ultimately the state.

The Charter Board revoked the charter for Citizen 2000 on November 18, 1996.

Ms. McDonald was found guilty of theft and was sentenced in January, 1999, and ordered to pay a restitution of \$15,479.00 and to perform community service. On August 23, 1999, Ms. McDonald's teaching credentials were revoked by the State Board of Education ("the Board").

In 1999, Ms. McDonald moved to Texas, where she began working as an educational consultant. While working for Texas Instruments in 2000, she became a Project Management Professional. In 2003, she began a campus-based position as Dean of Education for Clay Academy, a private Christian school. Ms. McDonald reported that when finances became tight for the school, her position was eliminated. She then joined Higher Education Holdings and began working with the Early College (high school) program, and served in the role of Vice President of Program Implementation. In 2007, she returned to Arizona to pursue a teaching career.

On April 22, 2006, the Maricopa County Superior Court vacated Ms. McDonald's judgment of guilt, dismissed the charge, and restored her civil rights.

She was notified by the Investigative Unit on June 3, 2008, that her application required a review by the Professional Practices Advisory Committee (the "PPAC") of the State Board of Education.

On September 09, 2008, the PPAC conducted a review of Ms. McDonald's application for certification and made its recommendation based on the following:

Aggravating factor:

- The theft and misuse of public school funds from a charter school.

Mitigating factors:

- Ms. McDonald's candor before the PPAC.
- The length of time that has elapsed since the incident (1999).
- No criminal convictions before or after the incident.
- Ms. McDonald has applied her skills appropriately by repaying restitution and completing community service.
- The judgment of guilty was vacated in 2006.

**BOARD ACTION REQUESTED: [ ] INFORMATION [X] ACTION/DESCRIBED  
BELOW:**

That the Board accept the findings of fact, conclusions of law and recommendation of the PPAC and **grant Ms. McDonald's** application for certification.

**ATTACHMENTS: YES [X] NO [ ]**